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HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-first session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 456th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 2 October 1990, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. AZIKIWE (Nigeria)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. CEM DUNA (Turkey) said that one of the major achievements of the Executive Committee had been the successful conclusion of the work of the Temporary Working Group established to deal with financial and administrative matters. The Group's recommendations should help the Office to enhance its ability to cope with different refugee problems around the world. Another important development was the recent establishment of a working group which would examine refugee protection and comprehensive solutions to refugee problems. Those steps had been supplemented by the High Commissioner's efforts to envisage more efficient and more realistic ways of discharging the responsibilities entrusted to him.

2. While the productive work of the Executive Committee and of the Office constituted a well-founded reason for optimism, the world refugee situation remained a source of increasing concern. According to the figures given by UNHCR, the total refugee population had now reached 15 million. The great majority were hosted in developing and least developed countries, where the refugee population continued to increase. The root causes of several refugee movements were far from being eliminated. On the contrary, new refugee-generating situations were emerging. While access to highly industrialized countries was becoming more and more restrictive and selective, "the others" were expected to implement an open-door policy in the face of continuous and massive inflows of refugees and displaced persons. Although the refugee problem was in principle to be tackled by the international community within the framework of equitable burden-sharing, a disturbing imbalance existed between the burdens placed upon different groups of countries. So long as it was not redressed, disagreements over important issues were bound to persist. Therefore, one of the main tasks facing the international community was to find efficient ways and means of sharing the burden.

3. In that respect, by hosting most of the refugees around the world, first asylum and transit countries had already done more than their fair share to meet the humanitarian challenge. They should not be expected to bear additional burdens. On the contrary, no effort should be spared to assist them. To that effect, the international community had placed its hopes on the deployment of greater efforts by traditional donor and resettlement countries, on whose assistance the world refugee population already depended to a considerable extent. However, the international community needed more generosity and understanding on their part. It was true that donor and resettlement countries faced various internal problems in the field of refugee protection and assistance which had a bearing on their contribution to international solidarity. In that context, better management of resources, a more efficient division of labour between the relevant international agencies, the deployment of preventive strategies, and efforts to find new donors were some of the steps that should be taken to encourage traditional donor countries which expressed a willingness to do more.

4. The ability of some highly developed countries to respond more positively to the problems of refugees in other parts of the world also depended on a favourable climate of public opinion. In recent years there had been increasing evidence of confusion in the public mind between the situation of

refugees and that of other foreigners who were trying to gain entry into developed countries. That confusion had been to the detriment of refugees elsewhere and had contributed to preventing a favourable approach to the admission of refugees from transit or first-asylum countries. There was a need to promote a better public understanding of the refugee problem in the world. To that end, it was essential to make a distinction between genuine and abusive claims for asylum. Granting asylum to persons making abusive claims, particularly to persons involved in criminal or terrorist activities in their country of origin, only contributed to the creation of a negative attitude to refugees in general. The allocation of available material resources to those who received protection in the guise of refugees resulted in the offering of fewer resettlement opportunities to asylum-seekers waiting in first-asylum or transit countries. Furthermore, undue visa restrictions to control migratory flows might provoke abusive applications for asylum. The need for illegal and, therefore, low-cost labour in some sectors of the economies of highly-industrialized countries was yet another reason which attracted foreigners and led them to abuse asylum procedures. A clear distinction between migration and refugee issues would therefore be to the benefit of all concerned.

5. Until conditions were ripe for voluntary repatriation, equitable burden-sharing should be a guiding principle in the search for durable solutions in the form of local integration and resettlement. Where voluntary repatriation was unlikely for the foreseeable future, efforts should be made to find the most suitable durable solution. Local integration and resettlement were applicable to different situations in different countries, and it would be wrong to give priority to any one of them. The choice should be made in the light of the desire expressed by the refugees and asylum-seekers themselves and of conditions in the host country. Countries where local integration seemed feasible should not be forced to assume responsibilities beyond their means. On the contrary, they should be assisted within the framework of equitable burden-sharing. Undue emphasis on local integration could result only in an increase in the difficulties being faced by first-asylum countries already overburdened with refugee problems. Furthermore, the principle of first asylum should not be construed and implemented as a means of imposing upon those countries the role of hosting increasingly large numbers of refugees for an indefinite period of time.

6. There were refugee situations where local integration was not a feasible and durable solution, such as the case of asylum seekers in transit countries, which could be addressed only through the provision of more adequate resettlement opportunities by refugee-receiving countries. Unfortunately, resettlement remained the least practised solution, and the situation of asylum-seekers awaiting resettlement continued to require more effective action. The number of asylum-seekers arriving in transit countries was increasing, while resettlement quotas remained limited. That led to an accumulation of asylum-seekers in transit countries, contrary to the principles of international burden-sharing and solidarity. It would be entirely wrong to perceive transit countries as permanent havens where the movement farther west or north could be contained.

7. Non-refoulement was one of the basic principles of refugee law. Respect for the expressed wish of the asylum-seekers constituted an equally basic guiding principle. Being allowed to go to the country of his choice was part of the asylum-seeker's privilege. Therefore, resettlement was a form of

burden-sharing which could alleviate the burden placed on the shoulders of transit countries and serve the best interests of the refugees themselves.

8. Mr. STROHAL (Austria) said that two years earlier there had been encouraging signs that the potential solution of regional conflicts would set the pace for the solution of important refugee problems. However, despite the successful Namibia repatriation operation and the voluntary return of a large number of refugees in Central America and Africa, hopes and expectations had not yet been met. Furthermore, new refugee situations had emerged and existing ones had in some cases deteriorated seriously. The overall number of refugees in the world had increased to 15 million individuals, 80 per cent of whom were women and children. UNHCR had the mandate to provide them with protection and assistance, even if the means placed at its disposal were insufficient.

9. Confronted with such a challenge, the international community must find political solutions. All concerned must make sustained efforts to stabilize and solve the existing refugee problem. Since most of today's refugees were not the same as those of 10 years previously, there were grounds for asking what had happened that had made the more recent problems so different from those with which UNHCR had been confronted in the first 30 years of its existence and which had, during that period, been solved to a large extent in a matter of a few years. The international community would have to make renewed efforts to bring about voluntary repatriation. His delegation was following with keen interest the evolution of the pilot project for the return of Afghan refugees and hoped that a peaceful settlement in Cambodia would allow for the return of Cambodians to their homeland. The same applied to many refugee situations in Africa. While the progress made with some elements of the Comprehensive Plan of Action resulting from the 1989 International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees was welcome, the full implementation of all its elements was important. His Government was deeply concerned over the effects of the dramatic events in Kuwait and Iraq on hundreds of thousands of third country nationals and thanked the High Commissioner for taking an active interest, at an early stage, in the humanitarian aspects of the problem and for starting co-ordination efforts, although the matter was not within his direct responsibility.

10. His delegation shared the serious concern expressed in the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection regarding the widespread violations of the rights of refugee women. It supported the draft conclusions of the Sub-Committee and hoped that they, together with future recommendations of the Commission on the Status of Women, would find their way into the revised internal guidelines which the Committee expected UNHCR to prepare. In future more attention should also be paid to the subject of refugee children and their protection.

11. International protection was the cornerstone of all UNHCR's activities. Austria continued to deplore the breach of fundamental obligations of the rights of refugees in whatever form it took, particularly refoulement, military attacks on refugee camps and settlements, and the recruitment of refugees into belligerent forces. Austria would continue to support the High Commissioner in his endeavours to achieve a truly universal acceptance of basic refugee instruments such as the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, and also encouraged the withdrawal of any existing reservations to them. It welcomed the accession of Belize and was confident that, in their process of

democratization and liberalization, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that had not yet acceded to the instruments would soon do so.

12. It was of paramount importance that the international community should sharpen its perceptions on refugee movements as distinct from migratory or other population movements, particularly since migratory movements of considerable dimensions could play a major role in international relations in the years or decades ahead. With that in mind, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria had offered to host in Vienna a conference on east-west migratory movements under the auspices of the Council of Europe. It was a well-known fact that in Austria, as in most European countries, the overwhelmning majority of asylum-seekers were not refugees. The situation in Austria could be seen as an illustration of the fact that the abuse of the refugee determination procedure by economic or other migrants might undermine the institution of asylum itself.

13. The Executive Committee could rest assured of Austria's continuing commitment to the underlying principles of international protection for refugees. Austria's performance in helping victims of political persecution over the past decades bore testimony to that commitment. His Government saw no reason to change its commitment in the present circumstances, although it was preoccupied by the increasing upward trend in manifestly unfounded requests for asylum.

14. His delegation shared the view that the dimensions of the refugee and asylum problem required a clear assessment, as well as the development of new comprehensive approaches. The Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/750) was a welcome element in the discussion process. The linkage between human rights and protection of refugees was particularly gratifying. The Executive Committee's working group on solutions and protection would provide another forum for the discussion of preventive and curative measures, including the all-important question of the responsibility of the country of origin.

15. In a more limited geographical context, his delegation wished to express its appreciation of the informal consultations on asylum-seekers in Europe and North America between interested Governments and UNHCR, which contributed positively to the protection of genuine refugees.

16. UNHCR had gone through a particularly difficult period. Thanks to the joint efforts made in the Temporary Working Group, it was to be hoped that a solution of the unprecedented crisis was within reach. The High Commissioner, the Deputy High Commissioner and the staff at large deserved recognition for their co-operation, devotion and regained energy. As the discussions in the recent meetings of the Sub-Committee on Administration and Management had shown, considerable progress on general management issues had been made; further improvements were likely to continue. His delegation realized tangible results arising out of the Temporary Working Group's recommendations on co-operation with other organizations, would take some time to achieve; it was, however, encouraged by the progress reported in the negotiations with WFP, by the relevant decision of the UNDP Governing Council, and by the resolution adopted by the Economic and Social Council at its resumed session in 1990.

17. Austria regretted the impact of the financial crisis on the delivery of assistance to refugees, on their host Governments and countries, and on the pursuit of real durable solutions. However, since deficit financing was a domain still reserved for Governments, there had been no other way out, and the Committee must consider itself lucky that it had been possible to keep the sacrifices and possible deprivations within reasonable limits. While there were expectations that the revised 1990 General Programme budget could be fully funded, there seemed to be no certainty of that. The unpredictability of income was still a problem and required an answer. That and other outstanding matters must remain on the Executive Committee's agenda and on the agenda of the Sub-Committee on Administration and Finance in particular.

18. The High Commissioner had enumerated three major objectives for the forthcoming months, all of which had their merit. In the short time of his tenure he had already gone some way to strengthen the credibility and moral authority of his office, and would no doubt continue to do so. In that, he could rest assured of Austria's wholehearted support.

19. Mr. CASTELLÓN (Nicaragua) said that, 40 years after its foundation, UNHCR was playing an increasingly irreplaceable humanitarian role. Although the past year had seen a series of events of great historical importance such as the end of the Cold War, the independence of Namibia, the release of Nelson Mandela, the peace process in Central America, and the return of democracy to Chile, there were still flashpoints that could affect world peace, such as the Middle East conflict, the Gulf crisis, the situation in Liberia, and the situation of the millions of refugees from Afghanistan, Indo-China and the Horn of Africa, which made it essential for UNHCR to continue its work and for the international community to continue to support it.

20. The main causes of the massive flights of refugees in the world at the moment were violations of human rights, racist policies, apartheid, foreign occupation, and inequalities in international economic relations. It was therefore a source of satisfaction to his delegation that the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/750) introduced, in the first three paragraphs of its conclusions, elements establishing a relationship between human rights and the protection of refugees and recommended future policies to both countries of origin and countries of asylum in order to encourage, inter alia, positive human rights situations. At the same time the promotion of peace and development in the third world prevented the generation of massive new flows of refugees.

21. In Central America, approximately 2 million persons had been obliged to leave their homes as a result of the crisis caused by armed conflicts in some of the countries of the region during the past 10 years. Of them, over 150,000 persons were at present recognized as refugees and were receiving assistance. That figure did not take into account persons who, although they met the established criteria, had not requested assistance or recognition as refugees. There were also persons who, having been refugees, had returned voluntarily to their countries of origin and needed assistance.

22. Concerned by the dimensions of the problem, on 7 August 1987 the five Governments of Central America had signed a document aimed at the establishment of a firm and lasting peace in Central America, thereby giving rise to an unprecedented process in the history of the region. Sharing the

concern for refugees expressed by the Governments of Central America, the Secretary-General of the United Nations had declared their situation to be one of the most urgent problems to be solved in Central America. For that purpose, with the co-operation of UNHCR and of the international community, an International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) had been held in Guatemala at the end of March 1989. CIREFCA had been in existence for only one year, but its regional and country projects had been considered to be models with regard to the extent of their implementation and the participation of all concerned.

23. The peace process in Central America had reached the stage where political and military conflicts were being settled by peaceful methods but economic and social problems also had to be solved urgently in order to consolidate peace and democracy and embark on development.

24. In his country, Nicaragua, the February elections had produced a democratic Government, the Nicaraguan resistance had been demobilized, the army reduced in size, thousands of weapons destroyed and thousands of Nicaraguans had been able to return to their country and to recommence productive activities. A new phase of reconciliation and economic and social rehabilitation was under way and the task of national reconstruction had to be undertaken after a war which had affected approximately one third of the population, including 354,000 displaced persons, 40,000 repatriated persons, 7,500 refugees, 18,000 members of the demobilized resistance, excluding their families, 30,000 demobilized soldiers and some 80,000 civilians who had fled the country.

25. The Government had formulated a programme, with the long-term goal of reincorporating those persons in a stable and permanent manner in the national productive process. Nicaragua needed external resources over the medium and long term in order to be able to take effective action to assist them and it had raised the problem within the framework of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA). His delegation considered it to be of great importance that the international community should continue to contribute to CIREFCA in view of the fact that the Central American region was working for peace and needed active help in its quest for durable solutions leading to peace and development.

26. It hoped that the draft decision to be submitted on the continuation of CIREFCA would be adopted by consensus.

27. Mr. MARTIUS (Observer for Angola), recalled that in his most recent statement to the Executive Committee, at the extraordinary session in May 1990, he had reported that 6,200 Angolan refugees had been repatriated from Zaire in February of that year. At the present time, approximately 29,000 Angolan refugees remained to be repatriated from Zaire.

28. His Goverment was endeavouring, with UNHCR support, to ensure the social and economic reintegration of the Angolans who had returned to the country and were seeking to be self-sufficient. They had built their own houses, were cultivating the land, constructing primary and secondary schools and a clinic. There still remained the difficulty of transporting food and materials to those areas owing to the war situation in the country, which his Government hoped would soon be resolved. In the meantime, it continued to rely upon the support of humanitarian agencies.

29. At the present time, his Government was concerned with achieving the repatriation of the many thousands of Angolans in Zaire and Zambia who continued to live in poor conditions without any status or future in those countries. His Government had already approved the economic readjustment programmme and the internationally recognized peace progress aimed at the reconciliation of Angolans. It appealed to the international community to proceed with the voluntary repatriation of the thousands of Angolan refugees, particularly those who had already expressed the wish to return.

30. The Angolan people desired peace and believed that UNHCR, as a humanitarian organization, would be in sympathy with their aspirations. His Government wished to express its gratitude to the various humanitarian institutions which were directly or indirectly helping to relieve the famine situation caused by the drought affecting thousands of people and animals in the southern and central areas of the country.

31. In conclusion, he said that Angolan refugees and returnees looked for support from UNHCR to enable them to be repatriated and reintegrated into their home areas, since Angola, as a developing country, could not meet all those needs by itself.

32. Mr. SMIRNOV (Observer for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), noting that his delegation was addressing the plenary session of the Executive Committee for the first time, said that for a number of years his country had followed with much interest the activities of UNHCR throughout the world and was greatly impressed by the noble goals of the Office.

33. The Soviet Union was not yet party to the main international instruments in the field of refugee protection - the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol - but endorsed the principles of those documents. The Soviet Union had recently taken some practical steps towards closer co-operation with UNHCR and had gained some experience by participating in some programmes in Afghanistan, Namibia and other regions.

34. The refugee situation had become more complex in recent years. While there were examples of successful management of a number of critical situations, some delegations had expressed concern about new trends and developments in that area. No continent had managed to avoid the suffering of refugees, displaced persons and emigrants. His country's concern was based on the widely recognized fact that regional conflicts, local turmoil and refugee problems were interdependent and that the problem therefore required a comprehensive solution with the united efforts of the international community. The only way to improve the situation was through the universalization of international instruments and a proper awareness of the special needs of each region.

35. There were no political reasons preventing the Soviet Union from adhering to the Convention or the protocol and at the present time his Government was examining possible ways of participating in UNHCR programmes. In that connection, he hoped that delegations realized that the serious economic difficulties which his country was facing at the present time would influence many important decisions.

36. Mr. BALOI (Observer for Mozambique) expressed his Government's gratitude to the international community which had helped countries like Mozambique so significantly through UNHCR, both materially and morally. For UNHCR's humanitarian action to be successful, it was essential that its officials should visit countries facing refugee problems in order to obtain an accurate picture of the situation obtaining there; he therefore expressed his Government's appreciation of the visit recently made to Mozambique by the Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees.

37. Noting that the potential number of beneficiaries of UNHCR programmes was growing at a rate that was not consistent with the required financial support for the implementation of assistance programmes, he expressed the hope that the problem would be solved through generous contributions by the international community. At the same time, his delegation considered it imperative that the causes of the increase in the number of refugees should be eliminated, in particular wars, and favoured the solution of conflicts through negotiation.

38. His Government endorsed the eligibility criteria of countries with refugees mentioned in the High Commissioner's statement but believed that they should be applied following a study of the specific situation in each country. The linear application of criteria might mean that the spontaneous return of populations was ignored. In the case of his own country, spontaneous return was a significant phenomenon. For example, by 1989, according to figures collected jointly by his Goverment and the UNHCR office in Mozambique, 232,000 refugees had returned voluntarily. Only 17,000 had returned through official repatriation actions.

39. The link between protection and respect for human rights was also of concern to his Government. In that connection, he drew attention to the following actions taken in his country: the strengthening of democracy, which would lead to approval by Parliament of a new Constitution that would establish a multi-party system; and the peace negotiations with the MNR, to be resumed shortly, after a brief interruption.

40. In the meantime, his country's assistance requirements continued to grow, mainly as a result of the improved security situation in several regions.

41. Noting that only 23 per cent of the amount requested for 1989/1990 had been granted for the relief of returnees, he said that in order to integrate them, programmes were being developed and land and other production factors were being distributed.

42. In conclusion, he expressed his Government's gratitude to Mozambique's neighbours which, although facing serious economic problems, had provided assistance to its population.

43. Mr. ORAT (Sudan) said that since the extraordinary session of the Executive Committee, the refugee situation had continued to deteriorate, especially in the developing countries, which still faced massive influxes of refugees.

44. The refugee problem in Africa and its impact on countries of asylum continued to worsen and was reaching unmanageable proportions. Africa, with 5 million refugees, faced diminishing external resources, an excruciating debt

servicing burden, deteriorating terms of trade, and the effects of natural disasters. Believing that the problem of refugees in Africa was primarily an African concern, African countries were firmly committed to seeking durable solutions to that situation. In implementation of a resolution adopted by the summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity in July 1990, the OAU Commission of 15 on Refugees had held an extraordinary session in Khartoum in September 1990 and issued the Khartoum Declaration, which addressed the magnitude of the refugee problem and the necessary measures to face it. He read out paragraphs 11 and 12 of the Declaration, which inter alia, called upon the Executive Committee to re-examine and review the present financial crisis facing UNHCR and to provide the High Commissioner with the requisite financial and material resources to carry out its mandate effectively, and in which the African Governments committed themselves to the eradication of the refugee problem in the continent. The Declaration had also underlined the serious and negative effects of a reduction in the budget of UNHCR, which had seriously affected the Office's humanitarian activities for the year 1990. The budget reduction measures had negated the very principles and spirit of ICARA I and II which called, in the first place, for durable solutions to refugee problems in Africa. The political will of the international community remained central and instrumental in addressing the refugee problem. African countries had reaffirmed their will to seek durable solutions to the refugee problem and to eradicate its root-causes, at regional and sub-regional levels, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Inter-governmental Authority on Drought and Desertification.

45. Natural disasters and problems of insecurity had driven more than 950,000 refugees into the Sudan, which continued to shoulder that ever-increasing burden. New arrivals had totalled 37,000 by the end of August 1990. Despite Sudan's economic difficulties, coupled with recurrent natural disasters, UNHCR's programme of assistance to refugees in the Sudan for the year 1989 had been drastically reduced by 40 per cent, with serious consequences for refugees. His country was unable to provide basic services for its own citizens, let alone for refugees.

46. As a result of the acute shortage of food caused by the drought currently experienced by all countries in the area, it would be necessary for the international community to take practical steps to meet the basic food requirements of refugees.

47. With regard to durable solutions for refugees in the Sudan, his Government was disappointed that projects for refugee aid and development had not yet received an adequate response from the international community. It hoped that the High Commissioner would give every consideration to those projects. In that connection, he called on the High Commissioner and donors to accord high priority to the economically and socially sound Southern Kassala agricultural project, to which the UNHCR had already committed itself.

48. The presence of large numbers of refugees in rural and urban areas created mounting pressures on public services, infrastructural facilities and the environment in host countries. In eastern Sudan, the public services, infrastructure, and environment had suffered to such an extent that additional efforts were required to protect the environment, restore public services, and consolidate the infrastructure. The basic objective was to enable urban and rural areas to continue accommodating a greater number of refugees and nationals.

49. Given the humanitarian nature of the refugee problem, his delegation agreed on the need to deal with it in accordance with moral obligations and legal commitments to provide assistance to the victims of conflicts in order to compensate them for the temporary loss of their country of origin, with the objective of ensuring their final repatriation.

50. Despite the many difficulties facing the Sudan, his Government would remain fully committed to the regional and international conventions concerning refugees and co-operate with the High Commissioner and all countries and organizations in addressing refugee problems.

51. Mr. DOUALE (Observer for Djibouti) expressed his delegation's satisfaction at the praiseworthy efforts which had been made or were under way to reorganize the structures of UNHCR and to meet the basic needs of refugees in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It noted, however, that the refugee situation in the world was becoming more and more complicated and required a great deal of additional assistance.

52. His country continued to be preoccupied by the influx of displaced persons who were fleeing neighbouring countries in search of security and a better life in Djibouti. While the great majority of Ethiopian refugees who had fled the Ogaden war in 1977/1978 and had lived in Djibouti for several years had returned to their country within the framework of voluntary repatriation operations organized by Djibouti, Ethiopia and UNHCR or had settled in other countries, Djibouti still hosted 2,000 Ethiopian refugees. Most of those refugees were young people who hoped, by remaining in Djibouti, to be able to obtain fellowships or employment in other countries.

53. For more than two years, his country had hosted 35,000 displaced Somali citizens who had fled from the north of Somalia. Most of those displaced persons lived with relatives or friends in Djibouti, constituting a burden on the country's economy, which was already suffering from the effects of the world economic crises, the consequences of the events taking place in the area, and more recently in the Gulf. Furthermore, economic migrants arrived from neighbouring States nearly every day.

54. In conclusion, he hoped that political solutions could be found to the armed conflicts taking place and that increased and adequate assistance could be provided by the international community with a view to restoring peace and security and respect for human dignity.

55. Mr. LANUS (Argentina) recalled that virtually from the day of its establishment as an independent State, Argentina had been closely identified with the cause of political refugees, asylum-seekers, displaced persons, and all those who for reasons beyond their control had to seek other lands in which to make a life for themselves. The reasons for that position were to be found in the country's history, and in its tradition of solidarity with those who had come to settle on Argentinian soil. Thus, for example, many people from the Middle East had sought refuge in the country after the Ottoman Empire had come to an end, as had others fleeing political persecution during the Second World War. In more recent years, many political refugees fleeing authoritarian régimes in the Latin American region had found asylum in Argentina.

56. His Government wished to reiterate its commitment to the humanitarian cause of refugees, a cause which was part of Argentinian tradition as well as of the tradition of Latin America as a whole. Since the signing, one hundred years ago, of the Montevideo Treaty on International Penal Law, which for the first time made legal provision for right of asylum on political grounds, the region had stood firm in the defence of those who suffered persecution for political reasons.

57. The Havana Convention on Asylum of 1928, as well as the Montevideo Convention on Political Asylum of 1933, offered irrefutable proof of the region's commitment to the cause of refugees. Thus, the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees had as its antecedent international legal instruments originating in Latin America.

58. At the present time, vast number of people were having to abandon their homes and possessions for reasons beyond their control. Many of the people displaced in that way were not strictly "refugees", as defined under the conventions to which he had referred. However, particularly in view of the High Commissioner's statement to the Committee, UNHCR could not feel that it was properly discharging its mission if it were to allow its hands to be tied by bureaucratic red tape and were to give no help to thousands forced to flee, on the grounds that they were not strictly "refugees".

59. At a time when the United Nations would seem to have regained its role and to be emerging as the proper forum for the political settlement of problems between States, the humanitarian agencies of the system should not be allowed to become inoperative for legal reasons in keeping with another age.

60. UNHCR should face up to the realities of the new situation, and the working group on protection and solutions should make a careful study of the dimension to be given to the term "refugee"; in his delegation's view, that definition should be broadened as far as possible. He shared the secretariat's concern that refugee women should receive special protection against the various kinds of harrassment to which they were liable to be subjected.

61. There had been a number of positive developments in the course of the current year. In Central America, the voluntary repatriation of some 18,000 refugees from Honduras and Costa Rica had been made possible by negotiation and dialogue between Governments of the region. Pledges of contributions made at the first follow-up meeting of the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA) in May in New York had demonstrated the international community's support for efforts now being made to achieve a truly durable solution by means of development projects which would ensure the integration of returnees into the community.

62. His delegation also welcomed the actions taken by Namibia, following that country's independence, which had made possible the return of 45,000 Namibians. Argentina was also closely following the process of the return of Cambodian refugees after recent agreements aimed at a lasting peace in that country.

63. Despite those positive developments, his Government could not but express its deep concern at the recent serious events in the Gulf. The plight of the millions of refugees who had entered Jordan and other countries of the region

and were enduring almost subhuman living conditions should move the international community to action, and Argentina was ready to play its part in helping to deal with the humanitarian aspect of the Gulf crisis, an aspect which was often overlooked in favour of the political and military aspects.

64. At the current stage of UNHCR's existence, when it was imperative to find imaginative and durable solutions to the refugee problem, the Government of Argentina stood ready - in accordance with its traditions - to co-operate actively with the High Commissioner in achieving the objectives which all present, both as members of the human race and members of the United Nations system, were duty bound to help fulfil.

65. Mr. SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH (Sweden) said that his Government fully shared the High Commissioner's view that there was an urgent need to take a fresh look at the capacity of the United Nations and of the international community to respond swiftly and coherently to today's humanitarian emergencies. The shortcomings and delays experienced in the humanitarian activities on behalf of those people affected by the Middle East crisis underlined that need. It was obvious that the United Nations was the proper instrument to deal with such crises, and indeed recent experience in the Middle East had shown that when the political will was present, considerable resources could be made available at short notice.

66. At the Executive Committee's meeting a year ago, UNHCR had been facing a crisis of confidence and lack of resources; the refugees themselves had borne the brunt of that situation. Today, despite the positive developments that had taken place in the interim, the Office was unfortunately still not in a position to meet the basic needs of such refugees. UNHCR's protection role should be strengthened. The international inability to cope with increased migratory flows was harming the interests of genuine asylum seekers. Many refugees today were subject to refoulement, or were facing detention in inhumane conditions. Because of lack of contributions, ongoing repatriation programmes were being hampered or even halted. Basic needs of refugees were not being met. Sweden was aware of the many problems facing the High Commissioner, who had had to manage an operation on the scale of that of UNHCR with a cash liquidity sufficient only for a few days ahead.

67. Although the Office had over a short period of time undertaken a number of measures to streamline administrative procedures and to reduce costs, the political will of Governments still needed to be kindled if it was to be provided with the means to carry out its mandate.

68. Thousands of miles away from the meeting room were people who had left their homes, who could no longer avail themselves of the protection of their own countries, and who desperately needed all the assistance that the international community could jointly muster. The task should not be an impossible one. Seventy per cent of the world's refugees were concentrated in five areas: Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Horn of Africa, southern Africa, Central America and West Africa. The progress made with large-scale repatriations in Central America and Namibia showed that solutions could be found in the most difficult of circumstances. Processes such as CIREFCA had also played a catalytic role. In South-East Asia, the fate of thousands of people was dependent on the provisions of the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) becoming operational, and on funds being made available by donors.

69. The causes of the problem of increasing migratory flows were to be found in lack of development and lack of social justice. Economic and social stagnation, an absence of democracy, and breaches of human rights were powerful factors in encouraging such flows. A better functioning world economy, improved development assistance, and greater protection for human rights would all be essential elements of any comprehensive policy to address the causes of mass migratory movements.

70. As far as immediate problems were concerned, Sweden had already made a special effort by significantly increasing its contribution to UNHCR and making that contribution available in the early part of the year. A few other countries had done the same. However, insufficient cash contributions still meant that the UNHCR was unable to initiate vital programmes, or to fund approved programmes, even on an interim basis. That very difficult state of affairs had led his delegation to endorse the need for a mechanism, similar to that already existing for UNDP, which would increase UNHCR's ability to respond. Timely initiation of operations could enable lives to be saved, and programmes to be put on the right footing from the start.

71. The provision for such a facility should be the shared responsibility of all donors, and he hoped that the resolution proposed in that regard would meet the Executive Committee's approval. His Government was prepared to make a contribution of SKr 95 million (approximately $16 million) to the mechanism as soon as it was established.

72. Sweden was now the second largest donor to UNHCR, and if responsibility for the world's 15 million refugees could be shared on a more equal footing, there should be hope of solving the problems facing the world today. He noted that the representative of Austria had recommended that the question of the Office's urgent financial problems should remain on the Executive Committee's agenda, but to his mind that was not enough: refugees needed food, shelter, and protection, and for that money was needed now.

73. The coming year would mark 40 years of dedicated efforts by the Office and its staff over the years on behalf of millions of refugees. Members had both a moral and legal obligation to meet the challenges now facing them. A healthy and well-funded UNHCR could not but be in the interests of all concerned.

74. The CHAIRMAN said he was sure he was speaking for all members of the Committee in expressing appreciation for Sweden's role as second largest donor to UNHCR, and in particular for its offer to put the amount of SKr 95 million at the disposal of the proposed new mechanism.

75. Mrs. ESCALER (Observer for the Philippines) said that her delegation had followed with keen interest the new approaches to the refugee situation outlined by the High Commissioner and appreciated UNHCR's efforts to involve the Governments concerned and other governmental and non-governmental bodies in finding durable solutions to the refugee problem. It strongly endorsed the emphasis placed on the close link between UNHCR's primary protection function and respect for human rights. The High Commissioner had taken a humane view of the refugee situation and shown an excellent grasp of the evolution of the refugee problems. Her delegation also fully agreed with the dual approach to the refugee problem, namely, protection of asylum seekers and tackling the root cause of the problem, which called for economic and social transformation in the countries of origin to encourage return and prevent departures.

76. In view of the changes in the nature and objectives of refugees and the social and economic imbalances in the world today, appropriate, just and humane solutions must be found by UNHCR and the entire international community to reflect those changes. The present Gulf crisis had exacerbated the refugee problem and had focused on the need for a concerted and well co-ordinated international effort to address it. Serious repercussions not only in economic terms, but also in tragic human terms, had been felt in her own country and in many others. The support and help given by the international agencies had been most appreciated. But, clearly, UNHCR could have done more to assist Philippine migrant workers if UNHCR had not been limited by its present mandate. The case of the Indo-Chinese refugees in Asia clearly demonstrated the need for new approaches. In that situation, a stalemate had now been reached in the formal negotiations over the return of those who could not legally be defined as refugees but who nevertheless had to be assisted and protected for humanitarian reasons. The High Commissioner's visit to the region soon after taking office had been deeply appreciated by the countries concerned.

77. The Philippines welcomed UNHCR's efforts to find innovative means to protect those who were classified as non-refugees but urged caution since the task of determining who among them were voluntary returnees and who were simply not opposed to return and might be encouraged to do so was an extremely delicate one. In discharging that sensitive function, respect for the human rights of the individual should remain paramount. Her Government wished to co-operate fully with UNHCR and was, therefore, speeding up the status determination process and accepted continued multilateral discussions with the countries of origin to facilitate the return of refugees. Only full compliance of all parties with the Comprehensive Plan of Action could produce just and durable solutions.

78. The Philippines, a country of first asylum with very limited resources viewed with serious concern UNHCR's present financial difficulties which had a direct bearing on the success or failure of attempts to solve the problems of refugees and non-refugees in Asia and on UNHCR's ability to continue efforts to find new ways of dealing with them.

79. According to UNHCR estimates, there was a shortfall of over $41 million - more than half of the total budgeted amount - for the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese refugees. It would be difficult to implement the Plan fully or explore other possibilities, under such a financial constraint.

80. The Philippines therefore welcomed the European Community's offer of assistance in reintegrating voluntary returnees and hoped that the offer would ease the task of UNHCR. The moral and financial assistance offered by Japan would be invaluable in carrying out UNHCR's tasks in the region. The Philippines also appreciated the fact that the United Nations Secretary-General had designated the High Commissioner as his special representative to co-ordinate and monitor the returnee programme to Viet Nam. Those two developments, together with the positive changes in Cambodia, where UNHCR would be required to perform supplementary functions, gave hope that durable solutions could be found.

81. The Philippines would continue to co-operate fully with UNHCR in the performance of its humanitarian tasks and hoped soon to become a member of the Executive Committee.

82. Mr. EL KHAZEN (Lebanon) expressed appreciation of the considerable efforts being made by the High Commissioner and his colleagues to take the Office out of its present crisis. Despite its difficulties, the Lebanon had always co-operated with UNHCR. For years the Lebanon had been in dire straits but the will of the Lebanese people to live and the co-operation of the international community and their Arab brothers had enabled them to reach the Al Taif Accords. His delegation hoped that peace would very soon return to the Lebanon and that the country would become an oasis of democracy and freedom. It appreciated the efforts made to assist the Lebanon in the past and hoped that UNHCR would continue its humanitarian work and help the many persons who had been displaced because of war and forced to seek asylum elsewhere. It drew attention to the request made for a review of the relevant figures in order to rectify the number of refugees and in order to take account of the inflation that affected the Lebanon's economy. He was repeating that request.

83. His delegation had studied the documents issued by UNHCR and the statements by delegations and supported UNHCR's humanitarian efforts to bring relief and help to refugees. It agreed that the concept of refugee needed to be redefined because that contained in the 1951 Convention was no longer appropriate. The redefinition should be the result of consensus and co-operation because that was the best way to protect the interests of all concerned. It hoped also that the discussion would be marked by transparency and understanding. It was convinced that the best solution to the problem of refugees would be to use the zero growth formula meaning the non-existence of any refugees. However, it was necessary, first of all, to respect the principles of international law and the principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations on resolving disputes by peaceful means, refraining from the use of force, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and respect for the right of people to self-determination.

84. His delegation believed that there should be an increase in the number of development projects to deal with poverty in developing countries and thereby put an end to the problem of refugees. If hunger was the cause of refugee flows it was also the cause of violence which, in turn, created more refugees.

85. The tragic events in the Gulf had increased the suffering in Lebanon because some 60,000 Lebanese workers in the Gulf had had to abandon their jobs and savings and to swell the ranks of the unemployed in the Lebanon itself, thus creating a heavy burden on the economy. The ongoing Middle East crisis and the continued occupation of southern Lebanon by Israel had forced many families to leave the area for security reasons.

86. Lebanon was an example of the international community's need for peace. The Lebanese were anxious to live in peace because peace was the key to all problems and once the threats to peace were removed prosperity could be ensured for all peoples.

87. Mrs. MISEREZ (League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that the High Commissioner's role was so essential that one could only view with concern the cutback in protection personnel, both at Headquarters and in the field. The effects on refugee populations of cutbacks in UNHCR assistance were visible. The League had succeeded in a modest way in filling a few gaps

over the last year but it was conscious that non-governmental organizations could not replace UNHCR in that field and unless the High Commissioner could cover his basic budget in the years ahead the toll in terms of human suffering would be heavy.

88. Situations such as those in Liberia, Mozambique, Somalia or the Sudan required very substantial inputs and forward planning. The Afghans, Cambodians, Vietnamese and Nicaraguans returning home also needed considerable help. The continuing escalation of asylum seekers was affecting most countries in Europe and Eastern Europe was beginning to face new challenges.

89. Refugee work was complex and arduous, the financial resources given the High Commissioner were inadequate and, in some quarters, official and public attitudes were becoming increasingly negative.

90. The problems of ongoing psychological trauma, which involuntarily uprooted people had to face, were far from being recognized and addressed. The incidence of trauma among refugee populations was greater than most people realized.

91. She strongly appealed for broader support to be given to the High Commissioner to carry on his extremely demanding task. The non-governmental organizations would continue to do their utmost, but could not take over educational or social programmes that provided security and hope for hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of people.

92. Mr. DANNENBRING (Federal Republic of Germany), Chairman, Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection, introducing the report contained in document A/AC.96/758, said the Sub-Committee had met on 27 September 1990. It had had before it two substantive subjects for discussion, the first of which was the subject of refugee women and international protection.

93. There had been unanimous support for the initiative taken by UNHCR in including the subject on the agenda, as well as for the background document submitted by the High Commissioner (A/AC.96/754). Delegations had commended the extensive analysis given in the Note of the special needs of refugee women, and the many sensible and straightforward proposals made for addressing those needs. They had suggested that those proposals should be included in the revised and expanded guidelines to be prepared by UNHCR.

94. Two themes had recurred throughout the discussion. One had been the paramount need to ensure the full participation of refugee women in identifying needs and resources, as well as in the planning and implementing of activities. The other theme had been the High Commissioner's policy of integrating refugee women-specific issues into all the activities of the Office, rather than creating special women's programmes; that policy had been fully endorsed by the Sub-Committee. At the end of the discussion, at the request of many delegations, substantive conclusions had been adopted.

95. The second main subject dealt with had been the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/750), which had been included on the Sub-Committee's agenda so that more time could be devoted to it than was normally possible in the plenary meeting. The Note's purpose had been to provoke more reflective discussions about the basic assumptions underlying prospective global refugee

and asylum policies, as well as any practical approaches those policies might entail. Debate on the Note had been particularly lively, and a global innovative approach to the development of future strategies had been commended. On the current world refugee and asylum problem, participants had expressed concern about the occurrence of incidents of expulsion, refoulement and forceable recruitment; there had also been some debate about the interrelationship between migration mechanisms and asylum concerns. As far as future strategies were concerned, delegations had expressed appreciation of the approach proposed in the Note and had recommended that it should be studied by the Executive Committee working group on solutions and protection.

96. He drew attention to the decision contained in paragraph 40 of the report that a further meeting of that working group should be convened as soon as possible after the current session of the Committee. An informal meeting of interested delegations of the Executive Committee would take place on Friday, 5 October, to exchange views on the future work of the Group.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-first session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 457th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 3 October 1990, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. CESKA (Austria)

later: Mr. AZIKIWE (Nigeria)

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Statements on the occasion of the reunification of Germany

General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

STATEMENTS ON THE OCCASION OF THE REUNIFICATION OF GERMANY

1. Mr. STOLTENBERG (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), on behalf of his Office, solemnly acknowledged the major historical event of German reunification, marking the rejection of the dogmatism that had bred the cold war. The new Germany was the mirror of a new Europe. He hoped both would be the mirror of a new world. On behalf of UNHCR, he expressed his best wishes to the German nation.

2. The CHAIRMAN, speaking on behalf of the Executive Committee, also spoke of the truly historic nature of the occasion coinciding with the forty-first session of the Committee. The German people deserved congratulations and admiration for the patience and perseverance with which they had managed to re-establish their unity by a peaceful, democratic process and constitutional means.

3. Germany's return to unity marked the end of the division of Europe and the confrontation between East and West. The crucial role played by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) should be underscored.

4. The Committee had high hopes of the German delegation's contribution to its work, and welcomed its support for the cause of refugees around the world. It wished Germany and its people well-being and prosperity.

5. Mr. BENEDETTI (Italy) read out, on behalf of the countries of the European Economic Community, an official declaration on German unification issued that day by the Twelve.

6. Germany's return to unity marked the end of the division of Europe and the legacy of the war. The German people was recovering its rightful place in the consort of nations, to the satisfaction of the Community and its member States. The historic change had happened peacefully and democratically, in compliance with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. The Community paid tribute to the steadfastness of the German people and the wisdom of the Governments and statesmen who had made it possible.

7. The restoration of German unity heralded a new era for Germany and Europe, and a period of co-operation and stability on both sides of the Atlantic. The unification of Germany was occurring on the eve of major decisions which would shape the future of the European Community. The Federal Republic had already made an outstanding contribution to European integration, and the united Germany would be a still more powerful factor for European cohesion.

8. Germany's regained unity would facilitate the task of the Community and its member States in consolidating, through the CSCE process, the climate of trust which now extended throughout Europe. It would perforce strengthen the peace and security, solidarity, progress and democracy to which all the peoples of Europe aspired.

9. The European Community and its member States welcomed the new citizens of the Community, and expressed their warmest wishes to the German people and Government for a shared future of peace and prosperity.

10. Mr. MARTIUS (Federal Republic of Germany) observed that the German Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Genscher, had told the General Assembly that Germany was conscious of its responsibilities and would work for peace and freedom in Europe and throughout the world. Successive Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic had repeated to the General Assembly that their Government would work for a state of peace in Europe in which the German nation would recover its unity in free self-determination. It had indeed done so, since reunification was the result of a democratic, peaceful process in which the entire German nation had exercised its right of free self-determination.

11. The united Germany would make no territorial claim whatsoever against any other country. It would confirm the existing frontier with Poland in a treaty under international law, thus contributing to peace in Europe.

12. The re-establishment of German unity and full sovereignty would not alter the country's active commitment to the work of the United Nations, particularly in the areas of peace and human rights, the promotion of economic development and social justice in all parts of the world, and the protection of mankind's natural resources.

13. As an industrialized country, the Federal Republic was conscious of its responsibility towards the less developed nations. Reunification would not work against the interests of the third world. On the contrary: the united Germany would work still harder to combat poverty and underdevelopment and to protect the environment.

14. On that historic occasion, Germany commemorated the victims of the Second World War, of tyranny and of injustice, and was mindful of its responsibility. The third of October was for Germans a day of joy but also a day of reflection. He thanked all those who had trusted and supported the legitimate rights of the German people.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

15. Mr. SHIRDON (Somalia) remarked with satisfaction on the reorganization of the Office and the balance struck between needs and the resources available. His delegation was particularly pleased that the cost of the revised general programmes for 1990 tallied with the approved level of expenditure, at about $380 million. It found it unfortunate, however, that special programmes were not so well supported, in particular the Special Programmes for Durable Solutions which, ironically, could release resources for use elsewhere.

16. On the subject of refugees in his country, he said that over the past decade Somalia had done a great deal for refugees despite the numerous difficulties it faced as a developing country, and had joined in concerted efforts to find a durable solution. Encouraging results had been obtained since the previous session of the Executive Committee.

17. In 1990, his Government and UNHCR had drawn up a joint plan of action which would allow refugees the choice of returning to their countries or settling in Somalia. Under that plan, refugees in the south had been registered and it had been found that 70 per cent of them wished to settle in Somalia while 30 per cent wished to return home. His delegation appreciated recent moves by some donors to offer durable solutions for the Ethiopian refugees, and the calls by certain delegations in support of such solutions.

18. As regards the refugees in the north of the country, the United Nations had recently taken the premature decision to terminate the Extraordinary Interim Emergency Programme, leaving over 150,000 refugees without any source of livelihood. His Government was therefore putting together an assistance programme with the help of the international community pending the imminent repatriation of the refugees, and was very appreciative of the generosity shown by certain donor Governments.

19. Developing countries which afforded asylum to a high proportion of refugees in relation to their own populations were, in essence, the principal donors to the cause of protection and assistance, but at colossal cost to themselves. The international community was approached from time to time for help, in accordance with the concept of refugee aid and development expounded in Executive Committee documents for some years. His Government welcomed the UNHCR initiatives in Somalia and urged the Office to revive its efforts to promote the refugee-affected areas project. In conclusion, he praised the work being done by United Nations Volunteers in his country.

20. Mgr. CAUSERO (Holy See) said that the Holy See would like a number of objectives and recommendations to appear in the High Commissioner's programme for the coming year.

21. In the view of the Holy See, the chief responsibility of UNHCR was still to afford protection, and the Working Group on Solutions and Protection should take that matter up without delay. In affording protection, UNHCR should collaborate with non-governmental organizations to ensure refugee safety. Humanitarian solidarity and concerns must not flag, despite clear signs that public opinion was becoming weary of the fate of refugees.

22. His delegation was happy that the High Commissioner and many delegations recognized the link between the refugee phenomenon and human rights, ignorance of which lay at the heart of the problem. The High Commissioner rightly pointed out in his note on international protection that action of two kinds was needed: promoting respect for human rights, and alleviating the socio-economic problems which provoked population exodus. That approach highlighted the importance of development aid and international solidarity.

23. The Holy See was particularly concerned about two specific aspects of the High Commissioner's activities which merited attention during a period of financial restraint and programme overhaul. The first concerned the vulnerable group of women, children and the handicapped. The assistance rendered all too rarely involved women in activities designed to benefit them, keeping them in a dependent status aggravated by the problems of security and self-sufficiency they faced in camps and elsewhere.

24. The second aspect was the need to ensure that voluntary repatriation - the best solution to uprooting - really was voluntary. In order to do that, refugees must be told what opportunities for reintegration into their home countries they would actually have, and it must be ensured that they could return in complete safety.

25. His delegation felt that non-governmental organizations could usefully help the Office to carry out its mandate, and should be more closely associated with the activities of the Office as partners. Such collaboration should be based upon an exchange of ideas and on specific arrangements for co-operation in the preparation of programmes of activity.

26. His delegation congratulated the Office on its tireless application. Like the High Commissioner, it felt that refugees and migrants were the conscience of mankind and a permanent reminder of the need to resist political and economic repression throughout the world.

27. Mr. RIVAS POSADA (Colombia) said that over the past year the High Commissioner had managed to turn the crisis at UNHCR into an opportunity to reconsider the administrative structure of the Office and the policies it should follow in discharge of its mandate. The High Commissioner was thus giving the members of the Executive Committee working with him an opportunity to help find the best ways of taking up the challenge which the international community faced: maintaining or, if possible, improving the quality of services given to refugees despite current financial constraints. To save money, UNHCR had had to cut its staff and close some regional bureaux. Care must be taken that the savings thus generated did not come at the expense of quality in the execution of either general or special programmes.

28. His country was particularly worried lest the programme set up following the International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA), which the High Commissioner had described in his opening statement as a model of what could be done to help refugees and of voluntary repatriation, suffer as a result of the decision to close the Central American regional bureau. It would be wise to consider putting off any decision on the subject until the work of CIREFCA had been completed.

29. Finding more efficient ways of managing resources was just as important as finding new sources of finance. The establishment of a special contingency account had been suggested. His delegation believed that, once properly defined and distinguished from the Emergency Fund, such an account could

provide a flexible mechanism for financing activities requiring an immediate UNHCR presence on the spot. Consideration should therefore be given to establishing the special emergency account in the near future.

30. Another matter of concern to his delegation was the question of priorities. The High Commissioner had told the Committee that, in view of budget restrictions familiar to all, educational services in some refugee camps had had to be abandoned. There were currently 200,000 refugees of school age in western Ethiopia and Malawi. If education was not felt to be as important a need to them as food, shelter and health, there was a risk that the tragedy would be repeated in other refugee camps. The young population would thus have to bear the consequence of the crisis. Education was an inalienable right of children and young people, even in emergencies. The purpose of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit for Children was to make respect for the rights of children and young people a matter of paramount concern for all States. Refugee childrens' education must not become an activity subject to changing priorities, as the Working Group's report recommended. On the contrary, consideration should be given to the possibility of establishing special funds for education, co-ordinating curriculum development with UNICEF, asking non-governmental organizations to make a special effort to help in that area, and appealing for volunteers so that the human resources available within the refugee population could be put to use; and inexpensive teaching programmes should be developed to enable children to acquire knowledge appropriate to their age which they would need to cope with their circumstances. The question of education showed how important it was to ponder the goals of UNHCR protection and to view UNHCR assistance in its broader socio-economic aspect as well as the "human rights" dimension of refugee status.

31. According to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the essential aim of protection was to ensure the exercise of human rights, which included not only civil and political but also economic, social and cultural rights. Education was the first cultural right and, as such, part of the basic needs of any human being. His delegation therefore appealed to the international community to enable UNHCR to give the educational needs of refugee children absolute priority.

32. The other matters which had given his delegation pause were prevention and the right of asylum. Developing preventive policies was perhaps the best and most appropriate way of reducing the number of refugees. It would require timely mediation wherever it appeared that conflict was about to break out, the promotion of human rights and the international instruments enshrining them, and the proclamation of the fundamental principle that regard should be had for civilian populations in the event of international or domestic armed conflict. By building on the programmes of assistance offered by the Centre for Human Rights and the good offices of the entire United Nations system in States where critical situations arose, the problem of refugees around the world could be attacked at its roots. That, however, was not a task for UNHCR alone. The entire United Nations system, including the Security Council, must be associated in effective and timely intervention. Such a concerted effort

would bear fruit eventually. Joint meetings should be held on the possibility, and UNHCR could submit a draft strategy for consideration by other organizations in the United Nations system.

33. The right to asylum needed to be defined in relation to the current scope of the refugee problem. The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees said that the purpose of protection was to preserve refugees' lives in conditions of dignity and freedom. Owing to their situation, refugees were particularly vulnerable and needed the support of the international community. But, as the High Commissioner said in his note on international protection, according refugee status was often tricky because of the great number of migratory movements in the present-day world. The criteria for refugee status must therefore be clearly defined in order to ensure that those entitled to it were granted the right of asylum.

34. The Latin American region had a long tradition of asylum. His delegation thus felt it important to define criteria by means of which the entire international community could accept the right to asylum as the proper form of protection for refugees. The task could be entrusted to open-ended working groups, perhaps with assistance from representatives of other United Nations bodies. An inter-agency dialogue would, indeed, help to advance the search for durable solutions to benefit a vulnerable group.

35. Mrs. LYAGOUBI-OUAHCHI (Tunisia) said that, despite the current difficult financial climate, UNHCR was sparing no effort to improve the lot of refugees - whose numbers, unfortunately, did not appear to be decreasing - and to help and protect asylum-seekers in every region in a spirit of solidarity and on the basis of equitable burden-sharing. There could be no lasting solution, however, without development aid. The continuing existence of certain sources of tension, of uneven development, of colonialism and of basic rights denied was an obstacle to development, like the human rights violations which the international community was duty-bound to overcome and settle. As development centred on the individual, she called on the international community to give substance to its pledges to combat poverty, inequality and injustice and encourage the creation of a fairer world.

36. International assistance to UNHCR should be commensurate with the growing tasks and responsibilities UNHCR had to cope with in order to ensure the survival, protection, reintegration and treatment of displaced persons with a modicum of dignity. UNHCR must therefore be given additional resources to match the needs of first-asylum and resettlement countries with their ever-growing burden. The return of peace to certain regions should be accompanied by moves to facilitate the reintegration into civilian society of refugees, who mostly received assistance. Accordingly, UNHCR programmes must be given enough support for the Office to provide all the assistance necessary to integrate the refugees into the economic life of the countries where they had found refuge. There could be no effective protection if the means to provide it were not available.

37. Assisting voluntary repatriation should remain UNHCR's principal concern, since that solution had the merit of ending the rootlessness and wanderings of the displaced persons concerned.

38. The documents before the Executive Committee called for thought on the future direction of refugee policy overall. There were ample causes for concern: growing problems with asylum, on which protection for refugees rested; the shortage of resources for meeting refugee needs; military and armed attacks on refugee camps and holding areas; the sexual maltreatment of refugee women and children; refugees and asylum-seekers in detention; refoulements; expulsions; and restrictive interpretations of the right to asylum, to jobs, to welfare and to freedom of movement. Faced with such serious problems, the Committee needed to adopt realistic and flexible approaches without, however, compromising the fundamental principles involved. It was also important that the difficulties it faced should not lead UNHCR to confine itself to survival operations and priority-setting. Nor should a want of resources hinder the ideal solution, voluntary repatriation, when conditions favoured it.

39. It was incumbent on the international community to concern itself with the welfare of refugees in the name of international solidarity. The High Commissioner's "six-pillar" strategy (A/AC.96/753, para. 18) thus deserved universal endorsement and encouragement. Her delegation was in favour of co-operation with development institutions. It strongly hoped that all States would make additional contributions. The developing countries giving asylum were already in the throes of economic problems, and were finding it hard to bear the weight of the refugees they were allowing in a spirit of humanitarian solidarity.

40. Her country associated itself with the repeated calls on the donor community to make an extra effort. UNHCR action would be made more effective thereby. New sources of finance also had to be found, in part by accepting private donations, to supplement traditional sources. Contributions from other international bodies working with UNHCR were to be encouraged, but UNHCR must not be relieved of its primary responsibility for affording protection and finding durable solutions. Additional resources would also allow fresh demands to be met in the event of emergencies.

41. UNHCR had a leading role to play in affording international protection for refugees; she emphasized her country's concern over the status of the Palestinians living in camps in the occupied Arab territories, whose fundamental rights continued to be ignored and denied, in as much as they enjoyed no international protection.

42. Her country fully supported UNHCR, and her delegation was ready to co-operate actively with it in the Working Group on Solutions and Protection.

43. Mr. ARTEAGA (Venezuela) said that his country supported United Nations activities for refugees and had therefore been happy to agree to the recent opening of a UNHCR regional bureau in Caracas.

44. The documents prepared by UNHCR for the current meeting and the opening statements by the outgoing Chairman and High Commissioner indicated that, if UNCHR had not yet overcome the crisis resulting from its precarious financial status, it was at least on the right track. His delegation reaffirmed its support for the "six-pillar" strategy the High Commissioner had drawn up (A/AC.96/753, para. 18). It welcomed the moves towards rationalization, and the spirit of co-operation and understanding shown by UNHCR staff. The organigram annexed to document A/AC.96/XLI/CRP.1 clearly showed the new structure of the Office, and his delegation approved of the logical and innovative design. Still, it was concerned that the Programme and Technical Support Section did not seem to be at the high level which his delegation had always advocated, notably at the extraordinary session of the Committee in May 1990. That concern was in part allayed by the document entitled "UNHCR policy on refugee women" (A/AC.96/754). His delegation endorsed the principles underlying that policy (para. 3 of the text). It wished to take that opportunity to congratulate the Canadian Government on providing a Co-ordinator for Refugee Women.

45. Incidents in which refugees were turned away, expelled, extradited or detained in inhumane conditions continued to multiply, even as efforts were made to promote respect for human rights worldwide. Recent international events had given rise to particularly disturbing massive exoduses. He had been very interested by the note on international protection (A/AC.96/750) presenting the outlines of a policy which UNHCR and the international community could develop together. That document would be very valuable to the Working Group on protection, which would be meeting shortly. He had also read with interest the document on refugee women and international protection (EC/SCP/59). His delegation noted with satisfaction the high priority attached by the High Commissioner to the question of refugee women which, during 1990, had been examined from a number of viewpoints by the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection as well as the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters. The demographic makeup of the refugee population had always been a matter of concern to his delegation, which thought it would be useful for the Executive Committee to be informed, every time it met, both of the problems encountered and of the steps taken to protect and assist all components of the refugee population. The Committee should also be informed of problems and solutions specific to each component.

46. In many cases, regrettably, the current crisis in UNHCR prevented it from saving lives and barely allowed it to do more than help people to survive. The statement by the Deputy High Commissioner to the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters had been very frank on that point. Without doubt, the situation was at the moment very difficult, in particular for thousands of refugee children. It must be hoped that the contacts due to take place between UNHCR and UNICEF would yield concrete results. He endorsed the High Commissioner's comments about programmes to provide education, a fundamental right which was frequently breached. His delegation supported all efforts to prevent such programmes from being abandoned. It also shared the

High Commissioner's concern over missed opportunities to find solutions. It must be hoped, at the very least, that the solutions already worked out could be put into effect.

47. Finally, his delegation was pleased that the process begun by CIREFCA was regarded as a model solution. The process was based on a link between UNHCR activities and development, something which his delegation had long argued for. His country hoped that future programmes would move at the same pace as those currently under way. It had already provided extensive support for CIREFCA and its follow-up.

48. As the High Commissioner had said in his opening statement, the international community would not be able to resolve the refugee problem unless it attacked the causes: the human rights violations, inequality and injustices which people had created and tolerated. The only solution lay in a policy of asylum for refugees and development aid for the dispossessed of the world.

49. Mr. TOTH (Hungary) welcomed the head of the German delegation, who was attending the Executive Committee for the first time as the representative of a united Germany. On the first day of German unity, it was particularly appropriate to look back a little and recognize the important role that the refugee issue, and more concretely refugees from the German Democratic Republic, had played in generating changes in relations between the two Germanies. His countrymen were proud of the decision taken on 12 August 1989, when refugees seeking asylum in the Federal Republic of Germany had been allowed to leave Hungary. The events since that time showed that a new Europe, free of fear and division, was no longer a dream.

50. He summarized the main factors leading to the establishment of official relations between his Government and UNHCR. In early 1988, his country had had to cope with a major influx of asylum seekers from Romania. In September 1988, the number of refugees had reached 9,000, and by March 1989 it had been over 17,000. All signs were that the situation was likely to continue, so the authorities, the churches, humanitarian and charitable organizations and even ordinary people were roused to action to help refugees. The country had decided to seek international help. In March 1989 it had acceded to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol concerning the Status of Refugees. In October 1989, the necessary agreements had been signed between UNHCR and his Government; they dealt with the first assistance programme and the opening of the branch office in Budapest. As a result, the necessary framework for co-operation between Hungary and UNHCR had been established just when the number of refugees from Romania surged.

51. The continuing influx of refugees had created problems which the country had tried to handle in a co-ordinated manner. Given its geo-political environment, it could only make use of one of the normal three options for solving the refugee problem.

52. Voluntary repatriation, one of the durable solutions, had been accepted in only 2 per cent of all cases, mainly during the short period between January and February 1990; since that time, practically no one had opted for it. The second option, resettlement in a third country, had also proved to be purely academic. While most of the asylum-seekers came from Romania, the existence of uprooted people from at least 17 European countries or ethnic groups and 14 non-European ones could not be ignored. Resettlement in a third country for asylum-seekers who, owing to their national ethnic, cultural or religious affiliation or personal ambitions, did not wish to remain in Hungary had turned out to be the privilege of a small minority. Only 10 per cent had received permission to move to the country of their choice in western Europe or North America.

53. The third option was integration. In the case of his country, that was what the majority of the arrivals wanted, partly because they knew that the other options were not open to them and also because their linguistic, cultural and spiritual background made integration a viable alternative. Hungarian regulations and practice made it relatively easy for refugees to find jobs or obtain vocational training so that they could ply a trade or learn a new one. Their integration was, nevertheless, extremely costly because many of them had dependents who also needed housing, education and social security benefits.

54. In December 1989, hope had been dawning that the radical improvement in the political climate, particularly in Romania, would stop refugees arriving in Hungary. Unfortunately that had not been the case, except in the first two months of 1990. Pogroms against "ethnic Hungarians" in Romania in March 1990, and crackdowns on student demonstrators in Bucharest, sent a new wave of refugees into Hungary. According to reports from the reception centres and local authorities, 14,342 new arrivals had been registered between 1 January and 31 August 1990, not including people who, for one reason or another, did not wish to report to the authorities. By comparison, between 1 January 1988 and 31 December 1989, an extremely difficult two years, 36,000 asylum-seekers had been registered. The figures available suggested that the number of new arrivals in 1990 would be substantially higher even than during that period. The refugee situation in Hungary was that sensitive to progress or setbacks in democratization in the region.

55. Those negative trends, aggravated by a deterioration in economic performance, were likely to reduce his country's reception capacity. Higher per capita debt servicing, the inevitable restructuring of the economy and increases in prices generally could only erode the budget allocations available for receiving refugees at a time when the increased number of arrivals really required a corresponding increase in budget allocations. In the circumstances, and especially since UNHCR assistance funds had not reached projected levels for either 1989 or 1990, his country's domestic efforts simply must be bolstered by external aid.

56. His country's attitude to the refugee problem was clear: it encouraged no one to leave his or her homeland. It did, however, expect a new influx of refugees. It had recently become an illegal transit country for people making towards Western Europe. Despite difficult economic and social conditions, it was abiding by its international obligations and trying to help displaced persons by all available means. Asylum-seekers were treated on an absolutely equal footing with Hungarians and had free access to employment, social security and health care benefits and education at all levels. Because of the wave of refugees from Romania, the settlement fund would not be able to cover needs for the remaining part of 1990. Financial assistance from UNHCR had declined by nearly 80 per cent in the current year, and a special, supplementary effort co-ordinated by the High Commissioner was therefore much to be desired, in order to enable the country to give asylum-seekers the humanitarian assistance they needed.

57. He emphasized, in conclusion, that the causes of the refugee problem must be addressed, with an emphasis on the link between protection for refugees and respect for human rights. His Government believed that it was the inalienable right of every individual to live, remain in or return to his or her homeland, where fundamental human rights and freedoms should be duly respected. His country would work resolutely to win universal respect for those rights.

58. Mr. Azikiwe (Nigeria) took the Chair.

59. Mr. KHAN (Pakistan) said that his country was providing shelter to the largest single caseload of refugees from Afghanistan. Thanks to help from the international community and the mobilization of its own resources, it had managed, at great sacrifice, to look after those refugees; but the decline in external aid over the past four years was making the task more and more difficult.

60. As the quantities of wheat donated by the World Food Programme were insufficient to meet the refugees' needs, the Government had already had to draw 570,000 tonnes from its own stocks at a cost of some $125 million, and would have to meet a further "shortfall" of 226,000 tonnes in 1990. It also had to spend large amounts ($27.9 million per year) on transporting commodities inland and compensating landowners for land it had acquired for refugee camps.

61. As for assistance from UNHCR, the picture was just as dismal. Assistance had fallen from $46.1 million in 1987 to $31.1 million in 1989. The $38,060,000 initially budgeted for 1990 had been reduced to $30,935,000, and only three instalments of about $9.5 million had been received so far. UNHCR's contribution of kerosene for 1990 had been slashed to only 19 million litres, from the 39 million originally planned. Saudi Arabia had pledged 20 million litres, but with the current situation in the Gulf it was unlikely to be able to keep its promise. The refugees would therefore have to fall back on Pakistan's meagre forest resources, already depleted, for fuel - which might provoke clashes with the local population. He urged the Executive Committee to take steps to halt the decline.

62. His country wholeheartedly supported the pilot project for voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees sponsored by the United Nations: it had already produced results, and should be extended beyond the stipulated three-month period. UNHCR and donors must, however, ensure that Afghan refugees who were unable to return continued to receive assistance in Pakistan until they were in a position to go home.

63. Many Pakistanis working for Afghan refugee relief organizations were made redundant when the organizations were wound up, and often found it difficult to find other employment. They should be compensated for their efforts with a bonus equivalent to one year's pay, plus one month's pay for every year of service rendered. Donors should also consider providing new vehicles for the relief operations, to replace the current aging fleet.

64. Substantial damage had been done to the environment in the areas occupied by Afghan refugees. UNDP had sent a mission to evaluate it. According to its report, colossal efforts and substantial resources would be required to repair the damage done in certain cases. His Government would shortly be approaching donors for assistance in doing so, and it must be hoped that the international community would respond generously.

65. The crisis in the Gulf had only aggravated Pakistan's already precarious economic situation. The additional expenditure entailed by the increase in oil prices was over $1 billion, and the drying up of the remittances from Pakistanis returning home from Kuwait and Iraq represented an outright loss of $400 million per year. Re-absorbing the thousands of returnees would also pose enormous problems. It was necessary to consider ways of increasing the part played by UNHCR in assisting expatriates suddenly forced to leave the countries where they had been working, who, deprived of their livelihood, were reduced virtually to the status of refugees. Nuclear, chemical and other accidents could create similar problems. How best to address such situations, of which there had recently been tragic examples, must be urgently considered.

66. Mr. RUML (Czechoslovakia) said that, after witnessing exoduses before and after the Second World War, his country had recently begun to take in refugees, and was running into many problems. It lacked the experience, the material means, and the legal framework to deal with the influx of asylum-seekers, and years of isolation had fostered xenophobic attitudes among its population.

67. Conscious of its responsibilities, the Government was sparing no effort to come to the aid of the refugees, who were being provided with assistance in a variety of forms at three reception centres. After consultations with the representative of UNHCR in Vienna, it had recently drafted a refugee bill drawing on the principles set forth in the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. The Government was also considering many applications for refugee status, bearing in mind the need to ensure respect for human rights, and observing the international agreements on the subject even though it had not yet formally adhered to them. Before the end of the year, draft legislation would be put before the Federal Assembly enabling Czechoslovakia to sign and ratify the Convention and Protocol.

68. His Government welcomed UNHCR's intention to help it deal with the refugee issue, and invited the High Commissioner to visit the country and send a mission to work out the details of co-operation.

69. New waves of refugees were likely to arrive in the months and years to come, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. European countries needed to combine their efforts to overcome the problems which would inevitably arise, and any solution would have to form part of a concerted move which took account of the new European realities.

70. Mr. HARUN-UR-RASHID (Bangladesh) said that, 40 years after the establishment of UNHCR, the refugee problem appeared to be more serious and more complex than ever. Nine refugees out of 10 came from developing countries, and while the situation had improved in Namibia and Central America, it was scarcely promising in the remainder of Africa and Asia. Additionally, the resources of UNHCR remained inadequate to meet growing needs, and it must be hoped that member States would increase their contributions in order to put the finances of the Office on a more solid footing.

71. His country attached great importance to the work of UNHCR, whose field office in Bangladesh was working well. It applauded the strategy proposed by the High Commissioner to deal with the financial crisis, and the increased co-operation with non-governmental organizations in the areas of international protection, fund-raising and public education.

72. The world was becoming increasingly interdependent and problems, increasingly international; solving them required concerted action. The problems included environmental degradation, which might in future lead to an increase in the number of refugees, particularly in third world countries.

73. Recent events in the Middle East had forced hundreds of thousands of people to seek temporary refuge in third countries. The international community and the media regarded them as refugees, but they did not match the traditional definition.

74. It was therefore time to look seriously at the mandate of UNHCR and its ability to respond to new situations requiring humanitarian assistance. Great changes had taken place since the establishment of the Office, but UNHCR had proved itself flexible and had come to the aid of many refugees in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Still, the definition of a refugee needed to be revised to cover wider categories of people and situations, and the further extension of UNHCR's mandate should be considered in that light.

75. Finally, he thanked the international organizations, donors, numerous non-governmental organizations and all the countries which had generously contributed to the repatriation of Bangladeshi nationals since the beginning of the Gulf crisis.

76. Mr. RASAPUTRAM (Sri Lanka) hailed the reunification of Germany and expressed his best wishes to the German delegation. He thanked the High Commissioner for his detailed report on the activities of UNHCR and his plans for making the Office more effective.

77. Conflict situations created migratory flows not only between countries but also within countries. In order to prevent too strict an interpretation of its mandate from restricting assistance to refugees who had left their countries, UNHCR must be flexible and show it could adopt new attitudes and methods to deal with new problems.

78. UNHCR must expand so that it could meet any eventuality. It must therefore have greater resources. At the same time, the additional resources should not be provided at the expense of development assistance.

79. Three years had elapsed since UNHCR had launched its Special Programme of Limited Assistance, designed to promote the resettlement of Sri Lankan returnees and afford assistance to internally displaced families. The programme must now make allowance for the many displaced persons coming from the Gulf. Thanks to the programme, executed jointly with the Ministry of Reconstruction and Rehabilitation, around 45,000 emigrants from southern India had returned to Sri Lanka and received aid immediately upon their arrival. In the longer term, the programme envisaged the rebuilding of infrastructure in affected areas and financial aid, vocational training and, where necessary, land for the returnees. Restoring damaged infrastructure was essential to the reintegration of refugees. The Government had also tried to create jobs in agriculture and fishing and, together with the National Housing Development Authority, had built 6,500 units of housing, while a similar number were under construction. The Government was grateful to the High Commissioner and his staff for helping to carry out the programme, sometimes in difficult conditions, for the benefit not only of target groups of refugees but also of local communities.

80. While helping to carry out the UNHCR programme, his Government had also tried to address the cause of the refugee flows, and had thus entered into dialogue with a variety of Tamil groups, including the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In early June, however, for no apparent reason, the LTTE had broken off the negotiations and resumed its terrorist activities, obliging the security forces to take steps to restore order. Terrorist violence had swollen the ranks of internally displaced persons. The Government was currently spending over a million dollars per day to help them and had chartered several ships to transport essential supplies. It was being assisted by UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross and many other organizations. The Tamil terrorists had destroyed or stolen UNHCR property, and threatened UNHCR staff. Although figures were hard to come by, LTTE activities appeared to have driven around 67,000 Sri Lankans to seek refuge in southern India. The Sri Lankan and Indian Governments had discussed how to deal with the situation and would be asking UNHCR to help them arrange for the repatriation and resettlement of the exiles in due course.

81. His Government hoped that the LTTE would forswear violence and agree to take part in the political process, which was the only way the people in the north and east of the country would be able to elect their own representatives democratically. It was pleased that it could look for assistance to UNHCR, with which it was in close contact both in Geneva and in Colombo.

82. Mr. KOBAI (Kenya) remarked with satisfaction on the administrative and budgetary measures instituted by the High Commissioner in line with the recommendations of the Executive Committee to improve the financial standing of UNHCR and enable it to respond more effectively to refugee needs. Unfortunately, the financial crisis at UNHCR had had a serious impact upon programme delivery, particularly in Africa.

83. He noted with concern that, as pointed out by the High Commissioner in his opening statement, UNHCR was finding it difficult to respond with sufficient flexibility and effectiveness to new emergencies or to plan ahead. That problem must be attended to immediately because refugee flows could develop very quickly, as recent events in Liberia and the Middle East had shown. Among other things, donors, both traditional and other, needed to consider substantially increasing their financial contributions to UNHCR.

84. Aid and shelter should not be permanent institutions, and every effort should be made to permit refugees to return voluntarily to their countries. Prominence should therefore be given to promoting the peaceful settlement of conflicts, and then the developed countries should help the originating and asylum countries in the third world, Africa in particular, to broaden their economic bases in order to meet the basic needs of their local populations as well as the refugees within their borders. It would thus be possible to stem the flow of "economic" migration northwards from the south and east. He called upon the donor community to honour the pledges made at the Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa so that the projects approved could be put into action.

85. His country was grateful to UNHCR for its assistance in meeting the needs of the refugees within its borders. Its reception facilities were, however, inadequate. The Thika Centre, for example, had been designed to house 320 people but currently had a population of 1,500. New reception facilities also needed to be built in the rural north of the country where many displaced persons had taken refuge.

86. His country was ready to work closely with UNHCR and the international community to arrive at peaceful settlements to the conflicts ravaging Africa, in order to promote by far the most desirable solution, voluntary repatriation. It had already been working hard to that end. In conclusion, he said that his country shared the joy of the newly reunited Germany, and wished it the best for the future.

87. Mr. CHADHA (India) congratulated the Chairman on his election and paid tribute to the outgoing Chairman, who had done UNHCR invaluable service in helping to streamline the operations of the Office and steer the

Executive Committee through a period of crisis. He had listened with interest to the opening statement by the High Commissioner, who had effectively highlighted the crucial issues and vital aspects of the global refugee situation. His country endorsed the three major goals set by the High Commissioner for the months to come. Like the outgoing Chairman, his delegation was disturbed that the number of refugees continued to grow and that refugees were mostly to be found in third world countries. It therefore supported UNHCR efforts to find durable solutions to refugee problems and to secure international protection and aid for refugees.

88. The people displaced by the crisis which had just broken out in the Middle East included at least 200,000 from India. The United Nations system had come to their assistance in a very creditable manner. His country had left no stone unturned to attend to the needs of its nationals and had already repatriated over 70,000 at its own expense. Although such persons were not refugees in the strict sense, they needed humanitarian assistance because they had been driven from their normal places of residence by totally unforeseen events.

89. Several speakers had already emphasized the need to distinguish refugees fleeing political persecution from economic migrants. It was true that more and more economic migrants were trying to improve their situation by applying for asylum-seeker or refugee status. Nevertheless, migrant flows still chiefly comprised refugees driven from their homes by human rights violations or conflict. There could be no durable solution to such problems until the human rights situation in many originating countries had been restored to normal. The Commission on Human Rights had repeatedly urged all Governments to implement the international human rights instruments which they had ratified. His country, with a long tradition of taking in and protecting refugees, had repeatedly emphasized that there could be no repatriation of refugees except on a voluntary basis.

90. His Government was very concerned about the influx of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka, who had numbered over 85,000 at the beginning of the year and had since increased to over 115,000 with the resumption of hostilities in Sri Lanka in June 1990. The burden of supporting over 200,000 refugees in its territory was, for his country, a very heavy one; it hoped that a negotiated solution to the Sri Lankan conflict could be found and that the Tamil refugees would be able to return home. His country was willing to help UNHCR establish and administer camps for Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka itself, under international supervision.

91. His country was favourably disposed to a political settlement of the Afghan problem in conformity with the Geneva Accords, and supported United Nations efforts to provide humanitarian and economic relief for the Afghan refugees. It had pledged 100 million rupees for that purpose, 50 million rupees of which would be channelled through the office of the United Nations Co-ordinator for assistance to Afghan refugees. The rest would be paid bilaterally; part already had been.

92. Over the past year, positive results had been obtained on two broad fronts. First, the United Nations had successfully repatriated Namibian refugees, and should be congratulated on doing so within a limited period and under sometimes difficult conditions. In Central America, the peace process had allowed many refugees and displaced persons to return home in dignity and honour. The accomplishments of the International Conference on Central American Refugees could serve as a model for dealing with similar problems in other parts of the world. In conclusion, he hoped that the High Commissioner and his staff would be able to acquit themselves of their noble humanitarian mandate.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.